DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 557 CE 068 380

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TITLE	Focus Group Report.
INSTITUTION	Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC. National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. for Literacy, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	7p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Diagnostic Teaching; Disability Identification; *Educational Diagnosis; Information Dissemination; Intervention; *Learning Disabilities; *Literacy Education; *Screening Tests; Staff Development; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Focus Groups Approach; National Adult Literacy and Learn Disabil Ctr

ABSTRACT

The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities (NALLD) Center identified as a major goal the design of a tool kit for literacy practitioners. In addition to training materials, the tool kit would provide specific information on instruments and intervention techniques to help identify and teach adults with specific learning disabilities. The NALLD Center conducted focus group meetings to identify the standards that professionals in the fields of learning disabilities, literacy, and adult education consider important in screening and intervention techniques used with adults who may have learning disabilities. The focus group meetings were held in Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; Kansas City, Missouri; and San Francisco, California. Focus group participants expressed a strong desire to think of screening as a source of prescription for intervention. Many individuals perceived screening as a means to profile strengths and weaknesses, as opposed to an indicator of potential learning disabilities. Comments that related to screening and teaching practices suggested a strong need to have a resource for intervention techniques. Screening standards and intervention standards related to specific instructional materials and methods were identified. Participants stressed that training and dissemination were aspects of the complete program that should be ongoing, open ended, and reflective of proven best practices. (YLB)

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ED 380 557

Focus Group Report

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center

A major goal of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (National ALLD Center) is to design a tool kit for literacy practitioners. In addition to training materials, the tool kit will provide specific information on screening instruments and intervention techniques to help identify and teach adults with suspected learning disabilities.

To design a tool kit that will be of the greatest use to practitioners, the National ALLD Center needed to identify what practitioners in the field like and do not like about materials that are already available. Thus, the National ALLD Center conducted focus group meetings composed of professionals in the fields of adult education, literacy, and learning disabilities. Participants were asked to share their opinions on the following issues:

- **Screening** processes used to determine the likelihood of learning disabilities;
- **Intervention** methods used with adults with suspected learning disabilities;
- Staff **training** to use screening and intervention methods; and
- **Dissemination** of materials to adult literacy programs.

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THE FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The focus group meetings were held in Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; Kansas City, Missouri; and San Francisco, California. Two meetings were held at each site for a total of eight meetings. Bev Schwartz, Director of Social Marketing at the Academy for Educational Development and an expert in focus group methodology, facilitated the meetings.

The focus group participants were selected from a pool of nominees submitted by stakeholders in the fields of adult education, literacy, and learning disabilities. Approximately ten individuals participated in each meeting.

Participants came from diverse backgrounds. Those attending the meeting included researchers, state GED administrators, correctional literacy center administrators, ESL professionals, librarians, and others in the literacy, adult education and learning disabilities fields. Several adults with learning disabilities participated in the meetings.

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Each of the focus group meetings was successful in generating useful information. Most participants were engaged in the conversations and were willing to hear each other out. A high quality of interaction occurred among the participants, exemplified by exchanges with each other rather than with the facilitator.

Most comments about adults who have learning disabilities were focused on the social aspects, or "real world" implications of the disability as opposed to information processing issues. Participants were interested in the "whole" individual and concerned about providing meaningful and immediately useful outcomes for the adult.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Regarding the relationship between screening and intervention, focus group participants expressed a strong desire to think of screening as a source of prescription for intervention. Thus, many individuals perceived screening as a means to profile strengths and weaknesses, as opposed to an indicator of potential learning disabilities. Comments that related to screening and teaching practices suggested a strong need to have a resource for intervention techniques.

Screening

The screening process can only suggest the possibility of adults having learning disabilities. Screening is not diagnosis. The following screening standards are examples of those identified by the participants.

- Research should indicate the screening is effective and appropriate for adults.
- The screening process should be able to indicate the likelihood of a learning disability despite a person's age, gender, race, ethnicity, or primary language.
- An adult literacy service provider should be able to easily learn how to complete the screening process.
- The items of the screening procedures should adequately represent the diversity of the learning disabilities.
- The screening procedure should allow for evaluation under a variety of situations requiring the demonstration of literacy skills.
- The time required to conduct and score the screening procedure should be reasonable.
- The screening material should be affordable.
- The screening results should provide a reliable indication of the learner's performance.

- There should be guidelines to follow regarding whether to refer the learner for further testing.
- The results of the screening procedure should indicate if the learner may have learning disabilities.

Intervention

The purpose of using specific instructional materials and methods to teach adults with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities is to increase the probability of their successfully acquiring literacy skills. The following standards are examples of those that have been identified as important in accomplishing this purpose.

- Research findings should show that the intervention materials use principles of instructions that have been effective for individuals with learning disabilities.
- Adult literacy service providers should be able to easily learn how to use the intervention practice.
- The materials and methods involved in the intervention should be appropriate for use with adults.
- The materials needed for the intervention should be available for purchase and delivery to the literacy program staff.
- The intervention practice should be applicable to a variety of instructional situations encountered in the literacy program.
- Procedures for promoting generalization of learned literacy skills to life situations should be provided.
- The expected outcome from an intervention should be described.
- The materials should include a description of how mastery or effectiveness is determined.
- Procedures for routinely and easily monitoring and evaluating the learner's progress toward improving the targeted literacy skills should be described.
- The results of the intervention practice should be easy to interpret so that a decision can be made regarding additional interventions.

Training and Dissemination

Specifics about the training of practitioners and the dissemination of materials will be ultimate outcomes of the design of the tool kit. In this regard, participants stressed that training and dissemination are aspects of the complete program that should be ongoing, open-ended, and reflecting proven best practices.

What Will Be Done With the Focus Group Findings

The purpose of the focus groups was to identify the standards that adult literacy and learning disabilities professionals consider important in screening and intervention materials. Training and dissemination methods for awareness of information about adults with learning disabilities were discussed and will be further developed as the tool kit is designed.

Focus group participants are currently responding to a questionnaire that will help us better understand their proposed standards and reveal other important issues to consider. This information will be analyzed and a questionnaire will be sent to adult education, learning disabilities, and literacy professionals nationwide.

The responses from these questionnaires will result in a list of standards. Practitioners will be trained to use the standards to rate screening and intervention materials in their literacy programs. Screening and intervention materials that meet most of the standards will be identified in the tool kit.

Research Implications

The results from the focus groups and questionnaires will identify standards that professionals in the fields of learning disabilities, literacy, and adult education consider important in screening and intervention techniques used with adults who may have learning disabilities. These standards will be used to evaluate the quality of existing interventions and screening methods and also the realistic outcomes from using these materials.

As practitioners rate the effectiveness of their materials, they will highlight needs they consider important which current materials do not meet, thus identifying areas that may need more research and new or improved materials.

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The National ALLD Center

The National ALLD Center was established in October 1993 by the National Institute for Literacy under a cooperative agreement with the Academy for Educational Development in collaboration with the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities (KU-IRLD). KU-IRLD has operated as a successful research entity since 1977. The work conducted by KU-IRLD has had a significant impact on existing educational practices for adolescents and adults who are at risk for school or job failure. KU-IRLD has been involved in project with Job Corps, adult basic education programs, community colleges, and GED programs.

The Center is a national resource for information on learning disabilities and their impact on the provision of literacy services. We encourage your inquiries and will either directly provide you with information or refer you to an appropriate resource.

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This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute for Literacy under Grant No. X257B30002. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Institute for Literacy.

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